Reviewer's report

Title: Low back pain education and quality of life: a randomized trial [ISRCTN48558333]

Version: 2 Date: 15 August 2006

Reviewer: Heikki Olavi Hurri

Reviewer's report:

General

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined? Yes
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work? Not quite, I specify below
3. Are the data sound and well controlled? Yes
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Yes
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? Not quite, see below
6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes
7. Is the writing acceptable? After some corrections

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Correct the spelling mistakes: Programme or program, but not programmeme (page 2).

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
1. One might consider the title once again. The study deals with the short term outcomes, and perhaps that message could be conveyed to the title as well.
2. I would like to see the patient description more precisely:
   2.1. What was the length of the low back pain? We only know that it was more than 90 days.
   2.2. What was the percentage of patients with sciatica?
   2.3. The expression "All patients had some kind of chronic low back pain and were examined and treated by one rheumatologist throughout the study" (page 2) is very vague. If all the patients were examined by one doctor, there must be more precise information and even classification of the patients. At least the points 2.1. and 2.2. should be looked more carefully.
   2.4. The ability to work remains obscure, and it hasn’t been used as an outcome measure. Why? The number of employed was quite low in the beginning of the study, and most probably their perceived ability to work as well. Do we know anything more exactly about that, and if we do, did the perceived ability to work change?

3. Methodological considerations

   3.1. There is no description of randomization procedure. That is usually provided and required in RCTs.
   3.2. Was the treatment allocation concealed or not?
   3.3. Were cointerventions avoided? Were they comparable between the intervention and control group?
   3.4. Was the patient blinded to the intervention?
   3.5. The analysis does not include an intention-to-treat analysis, which is usually required.
What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I don’t find any serious conflict of interest or competing interests. I am working for a rehabilitation unit in Finland, and of course we are applying the educational programmes as well.